Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise
Brings Cross-Platform Success to
Key Energy Services

by Bob Balderson

Less than 10 years ago, Key Energy was just another oil well servicing company working with fewer than 50 rigs. Today, as Key Energy Services, Inc., and with more than 7,500 employees, they are the market leader—the largest rig-based oil well services company in the industry. In their own words, "We are redefining the industry by using technology where none existed before; rebuilding equipment with unmatched speed, quality, and efficiency; and training our people to excel. We are committed to developing the newest technology and the highest standards of employee safety and training, to provide unparalleled quality and value."

Headquartered in Houston, Texas, Key Energy Services offers a comprehensive array of onshore energy production services, including fluid and logistics services, fishing and rental services, pressure pumping, and drilling. Jerry Karth is a System Administrator at their division, known as the Shared Services Center, in beautiful Midland, TX. Today, they have multiple servers running multiple operating systems, including IBM i, Linux, Windows, and Solaris. They have several System i Model 520 servers, split between Midland for production and Dallas for High Availability (HA) backup.

They've been using the Robot products from Help/Systems for about five years, and they are deeply into Robot/SCHEDULE®—the automated job scheduler and batch management software for Power Systems™ running IBM i. Previously, they used Robot/SCHEDULE with Robot/CLIENT,® the server operations event manager for cross-platform job scheduling, to schedule their jobs.

As Jerry explains, "Currently, our company is in the middle of an IT transformation as we move to the Oracle E-Business Suite." The company decided to switch to Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise,® the cross-platform job scheduling and event monitoring software, as they transitioned to Oracle.

"It's a big thing for us to be able to use Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise to actually track the progression of a job on another server from a central location—it's been a tremendous help. In fact, Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise has worked so well, we're planning to use it for the next phase in our transformation.

"One thing we like about Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise is how we can manage all of our systems and processes with one job scheduler from one platform and one display—use one system to run everything. Out of necessity, our production control team is large: three people here in Midland and another five or six offshore. They really like the idea of a centralized production control console—the Robot/SCHEDULE Explorer—one place where they can all go to find out what's going on."

Jerry explains why they needed Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise to avoid timing issues and smooth out their cross-platform processing. "We wanted our schedule to be event driven across platforms instead of time driven. We use schedulers on all platforms. On the UNIX side

we use Cron, and we have some Windows schedulers, too. We have to time everything correctly—it's a major issue for us if a process doesn't run. Luckily, the System i and the Robot products have both been rock solid, we've never had any problems with them.

"For example, before we used Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise, a process might have started at 9:00 P.M. on our Sun Solaris server and later, at 9:30 P.M. we would have to run another part of the process on a System i. Now, Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise puts all the commands for the entire cross-system process in one place, in one job, where they can complete and continue. If something fails, Robot/ALERT® (the system event notification software) sends a message so we know what's going on—what server failed and what process failed. Our processes are event-driven, monitored, and automated. For us, it's a big win-win."

Jerry also likes the fact that Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise helps them meet their Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) requirements and that access to the system job logs is available from a single graphical display. "In the Robot/SCHEDULE Explorer, the auditors can see a log for every job that ran and they know exactly what ran. If there's an issue, we can quickly say 'Here's the problem and here's the correction' by examining the log." They also use online logging from the job completion history in Robot/SCHEDULE with some customization to track processes. "When we send files between systems, the auditors want to know how many records were sent. So, we use a customized script to count the number of records actually transferred and make sure they actually got copied or moved. We've got it all locked down now."

Another useful part of Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise is its ability to create process blueprints that show the relationships between jobs across platforms—the big picture with detail. As Jerry explains, "Our people in production control really like the Blueprint feature. That's a big seller because now they have the visual in front of them showing how everything is supposed to look. They can see how the system runs, which makes a big difference if you're trying to troubleshoot, monitor, or change a process—they can look at the blueprint to see what the change will impact.

"We also monitor payment or service files. We use file arrival and departure events for our bank transfers and our outsourced payroll when we send out the payroll file. We put the files in the IFS and they get moved to places all over the world. We even use reserved command variables with Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise and a script to pass parameters to UNIX and Linux groups." Eventually, when the transition to their new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) setup is complete, Jerry estimates that Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise could control as many as 100 servers.

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Jerry and his colleagues appreciated how easy it was to get up-to-speed with Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise. "The learning curve has been very easy for us whether you're a GUI person or a green screen person. We gave the software to our application development group with about 10-15 minutes of training and the user guides on a shared drive to look at, and they were off and running, creating and testing jobs."

According to Jerry, "We finally have a tool that can actually do what we've been wanting to do for a long time. Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise is relatively new on the market and we just started using it, but it's already taking less effort to run our systems and less time to resolve problems. Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise is going to save us a lot of time and solve a lot of issues—it's a very solid product and we really enjoy using it."

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